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## THE EXEMPTION OF WOMEN FROM LABOR.

THE very original and somewhat startling plea of M. G. Ferrero in the January *Monist*, for the complete exemption of women from bread-winning labor is worthy of the author's chivalrous nature, and demands thoughtful consideration. One naturally feels impelled to accept his view, but such a crowd of practical objections at once arise that it becomes impossible to do so except in a very restricted sense. If he only means that women who actually bear children should be relieved from laborious physical activities during their productive period, nobody certainly ought to dissent, and it is to be hoped that the world has already got a long distance on the road toward such a result. But if he means that one-half of the human race should be and remain, from the standpoint of economics, non-producers, except in so far as the rearing of children is to be considered productive, the position cannot be maintained without important qualification.

So far as can be discovered from the article, its author proceeds upon the popular but erroneous assumption that every adult female in society is provided with a husband who is both able and willing to supply all her needs. To show how false this assumption is, let us glance for a moment at the conjugal statistics of the United States, which have been compiled for the first time in the history of the country for the census of 1890, but not yet published.\* These statistics show that at that date the number of female persons of all

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\* I am indebted for these figures to Mr. Henry Gannett of the Census Office, and to the Hon. Carroll D. Wright, Superintendent of Census, for permission to use them in advance of official publication.

ages in the United States was 30,554,370, of whom 17,183,988, or 56.24 per cent., were single. The important fact for our present purpose is the number or percentage of marriageable women who are in fact not married. It is found that about ten per cent. marry before the age of twenty, and a very few before the age of fifteen. As the statistics are compiled in five-year periods, it is impossible to obtain figures for any age between fifteen and twenty, although proper marriageability begins at about seventeen or eighteen. If we take twenty as the basis, it appears that there were 16,293,326 female persons of twenty years of age and upward of whom 3,228,-338 were unmarried, which is nearly 20 per cent. If we take fifteen as the basis, the number of that age and upwards was 19,602,178, of whom 6,233,207 were unmarried, or nearly 32 per cent. The true mean is somewhere between these and may perhaps be safely put at 25 per cent. The unmarried are made up of maids, widows, and divorced persons, the last of which classes is so small that it need scarcely be considered for the present purpose. Omitting the actual numbers and using percentages only, the returns show that between the ages of twenty and twenty-five about 53 per cent. were without husbands, between twenty-five and thirty about 28 per cent., between thirty and forty-five about 20 per cent. After this the number of widows increases so rapidly that from forty-five to fifty-five the unmarried amount to 26 per cent., and of women over sixty-five years of age only a little over 35 per cent. have husbands. Nearly six per cent. of all women never marry; about ten per cent. of those between the ages of thirty-five and forty-five had not yet married, and more than one-fourth of those between the ages of twenty-five and thirty were still unmarried. Further details are unnecessary, enough having been said to show how large a proportion of marriageable women are for one cause or another without that male protection and support that M. Ferrero's argument assumes.

Many of these unattached women are doubtless cared for in varying degrees by other male relatives, but it is clear that this ought not to be, since the men, on his theory, should have wives and families of their own. Ignoring, for the sake of the argument, the large number of cases in which the husband proves incompetent

to support his family, and admitting that the 75 per cent. who have husbands are adequately provided with occupation in rearing their children, or, if childless, as a large proportion always are, in merely attending to the wants of their husbands, what shall be said of the 25 per cent. who have no husbands and are therefore deprived of this occupation? A considerable number of the younger widows, it is true, have families on their hands, but these soon grow up and no longer require their attention. But if the wife is incapable of any form of productive labor, when she becomes a widow, and the support of her family devolves upon her alone, she is in an unfortunate position. Something more must be done than merely to nurse and protect her children. They must be fed, clothed, and housed.

M. Ferrero quotes, and quotes correctly, the economic law, or "paradox,"\* as I have called it, that female labor "tends to lower the marketable value of male labor." It has been proved that a man and his wife working in a factory only earn the same that the man would earn working alone. This gives rise to one of those economic fallacies which it is found so hard to dislodge. It is akin to the fallacy that machinery should be discouraged because it throws the laborer out of employment. It overlooks the broader truth that two laborers must produce more than one. It proceeds from the pessimistic point of view that economic conditions must always be such that some one besides the laborer will take all the product except just enough to keep him alive. I am far from advocating the increase of female factory labor, but such labor with prompt and certain wages is often preferred by women to the ceaseless toil of farm and dairy life, with the uncertainty of crops and markets. The whole economic argument of Ferrero applies as well to men as to women. The real need is a great reduction in both the amount and the irksomeness of all labor, a greater resort to natural forces through invention and labor-saving machinery, accompanied, as it will be if the embargo upon distribution can ever be removed, by a greatly increased production, so that both sexes may perform

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\* *The Psychic Factors of Civilisation*, p. 279.

only agreeable labor, may enjoy ample leisure, and at the same time may possess most of those material blessings which are requisite to the highest physical and spiritual well-being.

It could be successfully contended that a certain amount of productive labor, or, at least, of both physical and mental activity associated with the satisfaction of natural wants, is necessary, not only to health, but also to happiness, and this quite irrespective of sex. It might also be satisfactorily proved that in the present state of society, for all except the very poor, it would be better to equalise to some extent the nature of the activities of the two sexes, rather than still farther to divorce them. While there is no doubt that the sterner sex should perform the sterner duties, the prevailing notion that woman is made to remain forever indoors and inactive is, to say the least, extremely irrational and unhygienic.

Finally, what shall be said of the large and constantly increasing class of productive businesses which only involve manual exertion to a limited extent and largely consist in the exercise of various mental aptitudes? Take teaching as an example. Shall women be excluded from such fields? Shall society lose the benefits which the peculiarities of the female mind enable women to confer in many of these employments, where men are less efficient? No doubt there should be a considerable readjustment of the duties of the two sexes, and this seems to be in process of accomplishment in the natural course of things. The division of labor of which M. Ferrero speaks must go much farther than he intimates. He would confine it to one class of female labor, that of rearing families and gracing homes. While, so long as nature remains what it is, the majority of women will continue to perform that chief function, there is and always will be a minority more or less large and respectable who must perform other functions to which the sex shall prove itself adapted. And the question will even arise whether the domestic function is always to be considered sufficient to fill the whole life of woman. Wives and mothers are often endowed not only with aspirations beyond it but with powers and talents that demand an opportunity for their exercise. Such cases are destined to multiply with the upward tendency of society. Indeed, a division of labor is beginning to be

called for just here. It is found that without diminishing the efficiency of the domestic function or detracting from the emotional side of maternal life, much of the arduous part of home duty can be delegated by intelligent mothers to those who can do nothing higher, thus relieving the former from harassing occupations which lower rather than elevate their nature, and enabling them to attend to a nobler class of duties, such as education, charity work, social accomplishment, self-culture, or even authorship.

M. Ferrero does not say whether he would educate women or whether, like Rousseau, he would leave them to grow up under the influence of nature, but as education involves work on the part of the learner as well as of the teacher, it is to be inferred that he favors the latter *régime*. He speaks of beauty and grace as the chief charms of the sex, and hence the principal ends to be secured by exemption from work. He seems to refer to mere physical beauty and to ignore that higher beauty which beams from the intelligent eye and makes one quite forget that it may be set in a plain face. While it cannot be denied, as he points out, that ease and freedom from care produce symmetry and conserve beauty and grace, there will nevertheless always be plain women, and unless these possess something besides their "looks" to recommend them their chances of securing partners in life will be small. Moreover, that form of beauty which is purely physical is of short duration. It fades early, and the comeliest girl becomes a plain woman, or, when old, it may be, altogether ugly. But that form of beauty which is based on intelligence not only does not fade, but even increases with maturity. The first wrinkles only serve to give it strength, and it is at its highest when the radiant countenance shines forth under silvery hairs. The female child of nature is a wax doll, pretty to play with for a time and then put aside. The enlightened woman becomes the equal and companion of man, of whose society he can never tire. As man rises in the intellectual scale he demands more and more this substantial companionship of a wife. There will be a few cases, as our author states in a previous article,\* "of a *savant* marrying a

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\* *The Monist* for January, 1893, p. 232.

stupid, unintelligent wife," but these will grow rarer, and unless something is done to even up the sexes on the score of attainment, the number of unmarried is likely to increase. It was strongly maintained for a time that there was an antagonism between mental and physical development in women, and serious opposition was raised to giving girls a higher education, but at length statistics were appealed to and the objection was found to be a purely theoretical one.\*

The article of M. Ferrero would have interested me very little had he not professed to support his views with quite an array of facts from biology, which is the standpoint from which I have been in the habit of looking at such questions. Nothing is clearer than that man should be primarily studied as an animal, and every attempt to treat anthropological questions from a biological standpoint should be encouraged. But unfortunately thus far nearly every such attempt has resulted in a complete failure to make the proper application of the facts which biology furnishes. The fundamental fallacy, which I have written an entire volume to point out, is that of ignoring the psychic factor in man, i. e., of treating man *only* as an animal. Ferrero has not escaped this fallacy, and his undisciplined race of idle women would be little else than so many half-tamed animals let loose in society. But there are other fallacies which he, in common with most others who have approached the subject from that side, has been led into. The most important of these is his failure to understand the full meaning of sexual selection and the consequent sexual history of the animal kingdom. I have on several former occasions† endeavored to set forth this history in its broader outlines, and I need not re-elaborate it here. It will be

\* "Health Statistics of Female College Graduates," being Part V (pp. 471-532) of the *Sixteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Statistics of Labor of Massachusetts*, August, 1885, by Carroll D. Wright, Chief of Bureau, Boston, 1885. I am indebted to the Hon. Carroll D. Wright, U. S. Commissioner of Labor and Superintendent of Census, for kindly calling my attention to this important report and placing the volume in my hands.

† *The Forum*, Vol. VI, New York, November, 1888, pp. 266-275; *Proceedings of the Biological Society of Washington*, Vol. V, Washington, 1890, pp. 40, 41; *The Psychic Factors of Civilisation*, Boston, 1893, pp. 86-89.

more profitable to consider certain of Ferrero's illustrations in the light of it. He maintains that throughout the higher forms of animal life there is a division of labor between the sexes whereby the male assists in the maintenance of the female, and argues that this is the secret of the greater longevity of such animals, while the often brief existence of lower forms is due to the lack of such a division of labor. He shows that in some birds there is a form of marriage and true co-operation of the sexes, and says that "the lion and the hyena, during mating-time, hunt only to provide food for the female, who remains passive," and that "in the monogamic and polygamic families of monkeys it is always the male or chief who guides the troop, who watches for the enemy, who opens the march, who advances courageously upon the adversary that threatens his family, while the female climbs the trees." It would be strange if a few such cases did not exist where the very survival of the species depends upon the development of this instinct, but, as a matter of fact, they are rare even among the higher types. In the great majority of cases the female, in addition to her maternal sacrifices, not only provides for the nourishment of herself and offspring but also fights in their defence, while the male remains passive except when he is fighting his rivals for her attentions. I doubt the statement respecting the lion, for lion hunters learn by experience that the male is little to be feared, and even assert that he is a coward, while they equally learn to beware of the lioness, especially when her whelps are with her. Even Tartarin de Tarascon had learned this before he started on his *grande chasse*, and his only dread was lest he should encounter *la femelle*. It is the same with bears and most wild beasts. The males direct their prowess and confine their exertions chiefly to fighting off rival males of their own species, which contributes nothing to the support or protection of the "family." The barn-yard cock is often seen to call the hens to a store of food, but these chivalrous attentions, like many human ones, are only paid to those that are least in need of them, and always have reference to a *quid pro quo*. He is never found following the old mother with her brood. She must scratch for herself and her chickens too. Many ungulates are highly polygamous owing to the fierce warfare of the males for

the possession of the females. "In our own country," says Dr. C. Hart Merriam in an unpublished report, "the elk and the buffalo are notorious examples of polygamous animals, single bulls possessing large harems which they defend with most jealous vigilance at the cost of many bloody battles." It is also well known that among the latter of these animals at least there are to be found separate herds or groups of vanquished "bachelor" bulls that are not allowed to remain with the cows. This is certainly a poor way for the males to care for the females. One of the charges against polygamy among human beings is that it necessarily forces the women to perform excessive labor and drudgery, and if animals are capable of doing anything for one another it must be the same with them. A still more extreme case is that of the fur seals. "The male," says Krascheninikow,\* "has from eight to fifteen, and even sometimes fifty females, whom he guards with such jealousy that he does not allow any other to come near his mistresses: and though many thousands of them lie upon the same shore, yet every family keeps apart; that is, the male with his wives, young ones, and those of a year old, which have not yet attached themselves to any male; so that sometimes the family consists of one hundred and twenty." This statement made a century and more ago has been abundantly confirmed by later observations as recorded in Dr. Allen's work and still more fully by Dr. Merriam, who, as Bering Sea Commissioner, has recently enjoyed exceptional opportunities for studying the habits of these animals. Here also the bachelors, or "holluschukies" live apart, sometimes occupying separate islands.†

Any required number of facts might be adduced to show that nature makes scarcely any provision for the care and sustenance of the female and young even of the higher animals, and that male superiority here is simply the result of sexual selection, by which those qualities are developed in the male sex which are most admired by the females, among which, as to so large an extent in the human

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\* Quoted by Dr. J. A. Allen in his *History of North American Pinnipeds*, Washington, 1880, p. 341-342.

† Report of Dr. C. Hart Merriam in the Fur-Seal Arbitration Case of the United States, 1892.

race, what may be called moral qualities, those that would most benefit the species, play an exceedingly restricted rôle.

Ferrero's examples among the lower, invertebrate types are unfortunate for his position. In bees and the like the male is literally a "drone" and devotes his brief existence wholly to the *Minnedienst*; and while in other insects that he enumerates the female psyche has a sufficiently brief career, that of the male is still further curtailed, many male insects taking no nourishment at all and even lacking the organs for this purpose. It is a strained argument to attempt to show that this brevity of the imago state in insects is due to a lack of division of labor between the sexes. It proves a great deal too much, since many fishes are equally without provision of sexual co-operation, and yet they have somewhat extended lives. But most insects pass the greater part of their lives in the larval state which is often much prolonged as, for example, in the seventeen-year locust or cicada. Weismann has offered the only satisfactory explanation of the apparent anomalies in the duration of life in animals, and Ferrero would do well to consider this more carefully than he seems to have done. All the facts that he advances, while they have no bearing on the theory he is defending, go to support the law of normal female supremacy in nature as it prevails in the lower types and the subsequent reversal of that law by the stronger one of sexual selection operating in the higher types in which the psychic element has gained prominence.

On Ferrero's theory the bad treatment of women by savages constitutes an anomaly in the general course of development. If the higher male animals all worked for their females and offspring, supplying them with food and shelter and defending them from their enemies, while the females did nothing but bear and suckle their young, there certainly would be a marked contrast between their case and that of the savages, among whom, in most cases, it is the women who do all the drudgery work and in many cases supply the tribe with most of the necessities of life, while the men fight one another and other tribes, or hunt as much for pleasure as for meat, or lounge around the camp eating the food prepared by the women whom they do not allow to eat with them. But, properly viewed,

there is no anomaly in savage life. Among animals there is very little *provision* in the proper sense. Many, it is true, have acquired through natural selection the instinct of storing food, which is usually done by both sexes. Indeed, the most remarkable cases of this are among insects such as bees, where a specialised race of "workers" has been developed. Still more remarkable and opposed to Fererro's theory, these workers are females that have lost their reproductive powers, though, as pointed out by Herbert Spencer in his last rejoinder to Weismann,\* there are not only intermediate forms to some extent even now, but as this condition has been the result of slow development, there must have once been all possible gradations. That is to say, queens are transformed into neuters, and it is the females that do the work. In the higher forms, as I have shown, in so far as there is work to do, the females do their full share, usually much more than their share. The transition from the animal to the savage state in this respect is very slight, and the savage only represents a prolongation of the animal state. The anomaly is not here. It is located farther back. The whole upper part of the animal series may be regarded as anomalous, and the anomaly is a radical one, since it represents a change from normal female superiority to abnormal male superiority, a change brought about by the females themselves through sexual selection, whereby they have surrendered their sceptre and bartered their empire for an æsthetic gratification. To some this may seem a degeneracy, but few would wish wholly to restore the Amazonian *régime*.

The effort of a fully self-conscious intelligence as it exists in the most enlightened types of mankind is to preserve all that is best in woman, to heighten to the utmost that æsthetic attribute through which she has ennobled man and made him what he is. It is no longer woman who selects. From the earliest historic period at least man too has been exercising choice, and female beauty as it now expresses itself in woman is the result. But the progress of civilisation has wrought a change in the æsthetic tastes of mankind, and while physical beauty has lost none of its charm, moral and in-

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\* *Contemporary Review* for January, 1894.

tellectual beauty have come to hold the first place, and true companionship can only be found in the harmonious union of these three. Such a combination in woman can only be secured through a life of interested activity which unites the exercise of all the faculties with the acquirement of both knowledge and the good things of this world. Agreeable productive labor is the highest and only true source of happiness and worth, whether for man or woman.

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